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AUTHOR Jones, Mary Evelyn; And Others
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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the feminist movement it is probable that attitudes of women regarding mate selection have undergone significant changes in the 1970's. A replication of a study first conducted in 1939 which concentrated on the values and attitudes of females toward mate selection was updated using 935 single college females from 31 different universities in 27 states. Eighteen personality characteristics of prospective mates were rated by each subject. Mean ratings were computed for each characteristic and rank-ordered for comparison with previous studies. The hypothesis that present day females differ from previous generations in value judgment regarding mate selection was only partially supported. Comparison of the ranked values of the 18 characteristics indicated that the position of certain traits such as dependable character, emotional stability, and pleasing disposition remained high with all groups. Women also placed more emphasis on education and intelligence and less on ambition and industriousness than in previous studies. (Author)

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# FEMALE CAMPUS VALUES IN MATE SELECTION: A REPLICATION AND EXPANSION

MARY EVELYN JONES, M.A., Alpha-Omega Counseling Center, Nashville, Tennessee

W. BERYL WEST, Ed.D., Professor of Psychology Middle Tennessee State University

JEANNETTE G. HERITAGE, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Middle Tennessee State University

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## INTRODUCTION

The position of women in comtemporary society has been subjected to tremendous flux and revision. Woman's status, attitude, and condition has certainly been scrutinized by social scientists interested in these changes in recent times. Notwithstanding the body of knowledge existing regarding interpersonal attraction, it is probably that attitudes of women regarding mate selection have undergone significant change in the 1970's. With the advent of the feminist movement it is suspected that significant differences are developing in the female's orientation in selecting a partner for life.

To assess current conditions and changes, a replication and modification of earlier studies by Hill (1945) and McGinnis (1958) was undertaken. These studies were also replicated by Hudson and Henze (1969). Findings of McGinnis, and Hudson and Henze led to the conclusion that the college population in their samples had similar values regarding mate selection to those in the earliest study and no significant changes were evident.

Recent research on contemporary male attitudes (York, 1978) indicates that while there are general similarities between current and the earlier studies there also exist important differences in the characteristics college men prefer in a prospective mate. The purpose of this study is to update and expand previous studies by examining the values and attitudes regarding mate selection of a nationwide sample of college women.

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In order to expand on the original study by Hill (1945), some revisions and changes were made in the present investigation. Only the values and attitudes of females regarding mate selection were of interest. Furthermore, every effort was made to follow the guidelines and format of the York study (1978) as closely as possible.

Representation from all regions of the United States were desired. Therefore, questionnaires were sent to at least two universities in each of the fifty states. Fifty copies of the "Campus Values" questionnaire, along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and a stamped return envelope were mailed to faculty members at each university in the sample. In order to attain as high a return rate as possible, the questionnaires were sent to the twenty-seven universities from which York had received a response. For the remaining states, copies were sent to female faculty when possible; otherwise, they were sent to the psychology department of that particular school. Samples were obtained from thirty-one universities with a total of twenty-seven states being represented and a subject population of 935. In accordance with the York study, regional divisions included the southeast, northeast, southwest, midwest, northwest, and far west. Replies were received from each region.

### Description of the Subjects

The subjects for this study included 935 single college females from twenty-seven states representing all geographic regions of the

country. Included in this sample were 885 undergraduates and 50 graduate students. All data was gathered during the spring and fall semesters of 1978 with the subjects being requested not to sign their names, thereby guaranteeing anonymity.

Description of the Questionnaire

As in the York study the questionnaire included items regarding age, ethnic background, and university classification, etc. Subjects were then asked to rank eighteen characteristics considered to be desirable in a mate. These traits were taken from the original questionnaire prepared by Hill and Christensen in 1939. Characteristics were rated on a six point scale with "six" being most important, "five" indicating above average importance, "four" meaning average, "three" being just below average, "two" for items of least importance, and a "one" for those traits that are totally undesired or irrelevant.

Design of the Experiment

An analysis of variance was used to compare each of the eighteen characteristics and each of the independent variables (ethnic background, sorority affiliation, sibling position, etc.). Mean ratings were computed and rank ordered for each of the eighteen traits in order to compare results with previous research. A Neuman-Keuls was used to investigate any differences suggested by ANOVA to be significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of analysis of the nationwide sampling of female preferences in mate selection are indeed fruitful. The rank order and means of the 18 personality characteristics obtained with females are presented in Table 1. It can be noted that females ranked dependable character highest of all the variables, followed by mutual attraction. Pleasing disposition was ranked third and emotional stability, fourth. Table 2 represents the rank order of the traits for the present study as well for the 1939, 1956, 1967, and 1978 studies for comparative purposes. It can be noted from previous studies that the two highest ranked characteristics, dependable character and mutual attraction moved to first and second place respectively with emotional stability dropping to fourth place in the 1978 sample. Other changes which appear salient are a slight decrease in the importance of ambition and industriousness, and chastity by 1978 females. Along with the increase in the value of education and intelligence, an increase is noted in the rating of good looks in the current study.

### Discussion

Interpretation of the data indicates that there are similarities between present day women and previous generations, and some important differences. Also, some areas of agreement are present in the attitudes of modern females when compared to modern males as well as some differences of interest. The original hypothesis that there are significant differences between modern

Table 1

Rank Order and Mean Value of the
18 Personal Characteristics
for the 1978 Study

| Characteristic | Mean Value |
|---|---|
| 1. Dependable Character | 5.69 |
| 2. Mutual Attraction | 5.54 |
| 3. Pleasing Disposition | 5.32 |
| 4. Emotional Stability | 5.27 |
| 5. Education and Intelligence | 5.09 |
| 6. Ambition and Industriousness | 5.08 |
| 7. Good Health | 4.92 |
| 8. Desire for Home and Children | 4.81 |
| 9. Sociability | 4.77 |
| 10. Refinement and Neatness | 4.62 |
| 11. Good Financial Prospect | 4.41 |
| 12. Understands Home Management | 4.34 |
| 13. Good Looks | 4.16 |
| 14. Similarity in Education | 3.85 |
| 15. Favorable Social Status | 3.77 |
| 16. Similarity in Religion | 3.65 |
| 17. Chastity | 3.20 |
| 18. Similar Political Background | 2.35 |

Table 2

Rank Order of 18 Personal Characteristics in Mate Selection Based on Mean Value

| Characteristic | 1939 | 1956 | 1967 | 1978 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependable Character | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Emotional Stability | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Pleasing Disposition | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Mutual Attraction | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| Good Health | 6 | 9 | 10 | 7 |
| Desire for Home and Children | 7 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Refinement | 8 | 7 | 8 | 10 |
| *Good Cook & Housekeeper | 16 | 16 | 16 | 12 |
| Ambition and Industriousness | 3 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Chastity | 10 | 15 | 15 | 17 |
| Education and Intelligence | 9 | 14 | 7 | 5 |
| Sociability | 11 | 11 | 13 | 9 |
| Similar Religious Background | 14 | 10 | 11 | 16 |
| Good Looks | 17 | 18 | 17 | 13 |
| Similar Educational Background | 12 | 8 | 9 | 14 |
| Favorable Social Status | 15 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Good Financial Prospect | 13 | 12 | 12 | 11 |
| Similar Political Background | 18 | 17 | 18 | 18 |

*Changed to Understands Home Management in the 1978 study

females and previous day females is only partially supported. However, of special significance are the indications of the current research that feminist attitudes are resulting in some variation between modern females and modern males (Table 3).

Comparison of the ranked values of the 18 characteristics indicated that certain traits, i.e., dependable character, emotional stability and pleasing disposition remained high in value in present generations and also in both males and females. Some traits, however, appear to have changed in value ranking for females over the years from the 1939 study to the present in a direction which would be predictable considering the feminist movement. Mutual attraction, although given a high rating in each of the previous studies moved up to second place with the women of this study. Good looks increased in importance also. Now that women have more options in lifestyles, perhaps they can afford to be more selective in a mate. Whereas in the past, women often had to rely on a man for financial support, they maybe could not be so particular about a man's physical appearance, or give as much importance to both parties being equally interested ineach other. While placing more emphasis on education and intelligence, women attached less importance to the characteristics of ambition and industriousness. An explanation for these findings could be that because females are now becoming more educated, they want a more educated mate. However, along with this increased educational status they have gained the ability to support themselves financially, thereby becoming more self-reliant, and placing much

Table 3

Rank Order and Mean Value of the
18 Personal Characteristics
for the 1978 Study of Males

| Characteristic | Mean Value |
|---|---|
| 1. Mutual Attraction | 5.62 |
| 2. Dependable Character | 5.51 |
| 3. Pleasing Disposition | 5.33 |
| 4. Emotional Stability | 5.13 |
| 5. Good Health | 4.92 |
| 6. Education and Intelligence | 4.91 |
| 7. Good Looks | 4.78 |
| 8. Refinement and Neatness | 4.75 |
| 9. Sociability | 4.66 |
| 10. Ambition and Industriousness | 4.65 |
| 11. Desire for Home and Children | 4.44 |
| 12. Good Cook and Housekeeper | 4.25 |
| 13. Chastity | 3.50 |
| 14. Similarity in Religion | 3.42 |
| 15. Similarity in Education | 3.32 |
| 16. Favorable Social Status | 3.26 |
| 17. Good Financial Prospect | 3.03 |
| 18. Similar Political Background | 2.19 |

less dependence on their mate. Chastity dropped from tenth place in the original study to seventeenth in the present one. Although this finding indicated a tremendous change since 1939, the two intermediate studies in 1956 and 1967 showed a decline in the importance of chastity with both ranking it fifteenth. These findings might suggest that a change in female attitudes is taking place in the direction of less concern with traditional females values as more interest in career, self-actualization, etc., occur concomitant with the feminist movement.

Some interesting results of the present study were found in a number of areas. Significant differences in female attitudes occurred regionally with eight different variables. Closer scrutiny indicated that women in the southwest ranked five of these variables higher than other regions. These are desire for home and children, ambition and industriousness, chastity, religion, and similarity in education. Whether or not these and other variables which differ from region to region are indicative of differences in the speed of attitude changes across geographic areas can not be determined from this research but could be of interest in future studies.

Although few differences were reported in previous research with males in regard to ethnic background, the current study indicated differences between black and white females in ten different areas. Whereas Caucasian females ranked the traditional top characteristics, dependable character, mutual attraction and pleasing disposition higher than Negro females, black women ranked seven other variables higher. These were ambition and industriousness, good health, refinement and neatness, good financial prospect,

home management, social status and similar political background. Previous research (York, 1978) indicated that male Negroes ranked favorable social status higher than male Caucasians. Perhaps the modern day black females, being motivated not only by black liberation and female liberation philosophy, may place more emphasis on upward, mobile, status seeking traits in mate selection than the white woman. Further research is needed to assess the differences between black and whites in light of these suggestions.

University classification and sorority membership variables revealed results not unlike previous studies with males. Generally, prior research indicated that female graduate students as well as male graduate students placed more emphasis on education and intelligence than undergraduates. Also, sorority members placed more emphasis on desire for home and children as did fraternity members in prior studies. However, graduate females and sorority members did not differ significantly from undergraduates and non-sorority members on chastity and religion as did males in the 1978 study by York. Once again these results suggest that changes are occurring in female attitudes that may still be traditional in males. This is also suggested by the fact that these variables, chastity and religion decreased in ranking of value for females, but was not reported to decrease in research with males. Interestingly, a great amount of regional variation occurred with regard to the value of chastity. In general, the females and the males of the northwest and southwest placed more value on chastity than did those in other areas. Further research is suggested to determine if certain parts of the country are changing more rapidly than others.

Much of the data regarding marital status was predictable. Divorced women valued ambition and industriousness, financial prospect, and home management, whereas never-married females placed somewhat more emphasis on religion and chastity. This is most likely a result of having had experience with prior mate selection, and accordingly valuing characteristics viewed as potentially reinforcing, higher than those that are idealistic. An unexpected result was the indication that similarity in religion was ranked higher by Protestants than by Catholics. Also, the finding that Jewish females ranked mutual attraction higher, and chastity and good financial prospect lower than others was unexpected. Some reassessment of common stereotyped beliefs seems in order.

Camparison of females from state and private schools yielded results which are predictable. Generally, private school females ranked similarity in education, similarity in religion, and chastity higher than girls from state schools. On the other hand the females in state colleges ranked refinement higher than those in private schools. Possibly this finding indicated that in mate selection the women from state schools may involve selection of traits which private school girls take for granted. Furthermore, it is expected that religion, education, and chastity would be reinforcing traits to girls who attend private schools or church affiliated schools.

Finally, the many relationships which have been indicated by the current research are intertwined and constitute topics which would very well suggest a number of areas for further study. It

certainly can be concluded that in mate selection there are variables which appear to be stable components over time in both males and females. Furthermore, variation occurs in many ways between the sexes and generations, as well as between regions, races, and a host of other variables.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study was designed to replicate and expand a study first conducted in 1939 entitled, "Campus Values in Mate Selection." A Recent replication by York, 1978, generated, updated, and expanded data on this subject with present day college males. The current research was designed to perform this same purpose with female college students. As in the study on males, nationwide sampling was attempted. The general hypothesis was that modern females of the late 1970's would vary in value and attitudes regarding mate selection from previous generations. It was further speculated that changes in attitudes would to some extent reflect the changes generally associated with the feminist movement.

The subjects were 935 single (never-married, divorced, and widowed) college females from 31 universities in 27 states representing all geographical regions in the country. Questionnaires were sent to colleges for subjects to rate 18 personal characteristics as to importance in consideration of a mate. The 18 characteristics were ranked ordered. Mean ratings were then computed for the purpose of comparison as to the relative value of each. An analysis of variance between the 18 characteristics and the independent variables was computed with significant differences investigated by use of Newman-Keuls analysis.

The results indicated that certain characteristics such as dependable character, mutual attraction, pleasing disposition, and emotional stability retained their importance in current females. Certain changes have occurred in modern female attitudes and numerous variations were indicated by different regions and ethnic background. Results were discussed in light of previous and recent research with relationships to the feminist movement suggested. Suggestions for future research were indicated. Partial support for the original hypothesis plus suggestions regarding changes in the attitudes of modern women in light of the feminist movement, coupled with the extensive amount of data provided for future research are contributions of this study.

"CAMPUS VALUES" QUESTIONNAIRE

THIS IS AN ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE, PLEASE DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

AGE___ ETHNIC BACKGROUND: CAUCASIAN___ORIENTAL___NEGRO___
AMERICAN INDIAN___SPANISH___
FOREIGN___.

UNIVERSITY CLASSIFICATION: FR___SOPH___JR___SR___ GRAD STU____

IS YOUR SCHOOL: STATE FUNDED_____ PRIVATE INSTITUTION____

SORORITY MEMBER: YES___ ARE YOU A VIRGIN? YES___
NO___ NO___

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE: PROTESTANT___CATHOLIC___JEW___
OTHER___

HOW DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF POLITICALLY?
NON-POLITICAL___CONSERVATIVE___MODERATE___LIBERAL___RADICAL___

PARTY AFFILIATION: DEMOCRAT___REPUBLICAN___INDEPENDENT___
OTHER___

TOTAL NUMBER OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS___YOUR SIBLING POSITION___

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN MARRIED? YES___NO___
IF YES, ARE YOU DIVORCED?___OR WIDOWED?___

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Listed below are traits that are commonly looked for in choosing a mate. Consider them from the standpoint of the kind of marriage partner you would like to have. Please indicate your preference in the following manner:

First, place a six (6) in front of the four or five items that you consider most important. Second, place a five (5) in front of the four or five items that you consider of next importance--above average, but not of most importance. Finally, continue in this same manner until all of the items have been rated--using a four (4) to designate average importance; a three (3) just below average; a two (2) of least importance; and a one (1) of no importance at all. (NOTE: Use a one (1) only if there are items that are totally irrelevant, unimportant, or undesired on your part. DO NOT LEAVE ANY SPACES BLANK.)

6.....Most important
5.....Above average importance
4.....Average importance
3.....Just below average
2.....Least importance
1.....No importance at all

____Favorable Social Status (Rates socially, is prominent, popular).

____Desire for Home and Children (Family-mindedness).

____Good Health (Not ill, or delicate, or usually tired).

____Good Financial Prospect.

____Understands Home Management.

____Ambition, Industriousness (Restless to achieve, to get ahead, not lazy.

____Refinement and Neatness (Clean, neat, wears clothes well, refined).

____Good Looks (Physically attractive, sex appeal, well-proportioned body

____Sociability (Meets people well; is able to mix well in most situations; is at home with the social arts such as conversation, dancing, sports).

____Mutual attraction, Love (Romantic appeal).

____Education and Intelligence (Thinks logically and deeply).

____Pleasing disposition (Cheerful, agreeable, optimistic, good sport).

____Chastity

____Similarity in Religion

____Similarity in Education

____Similar political background.

____Dependable character (Sincere, honest, reliable, can be trusted).

____Emotional Stability (Adaptable, not tempermental, sulky or childish).

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